

The Christian

No. 258

Edited by
KATHLEEN BLISS

News-Letter

17th April, 1946

DEAR MEMBER,

If the correspondence which reaches our office is any indication of the state of Christian public opinion, few questions so deeply trouble the conscience of Christian people at this moment as that of the relief of suffering in Europe.

AID FOR EUROPE

As we have said before in the News-Letter, there are two questions in which Christians are concerned. The first is the large scale question of the policy of Government in a time of world shortage of food. There has been some good hard hitting on this subject in recent weeks, notably by Mr. La Guardia, the new director-general of U.N.R.R.A., who brings to his appallingly difficult task the sense of urgency and the quality of drive which are so desperately needed. The Government White Paper on the food situation and the debate in the House of Commons on April 4th were disappointing. While there was a strong emphasis on the necessity of seeing the food situation as a world problem and the acceptance—and this is something new and revolutionary—of the principle that every person in the world should and can have adequate food, all this was seen as something belonging to the future. Most of the members who spoke were disquieted about our own food situation, but seemed to share the general public state of unawareness of the contrast between the dullness of our own diet and the starkness of the conditions prevailing in large areas of Europe and the East. The one fact which would enable people in this country to judge whether our Government is doing the utmost that its straitened circumstances permit to relieve the immediate crisis on the Continent between now and the next harvest is, as Sir Arthur Salter pointed out in the debate, unknown even to members of Parliament. Nobody knows the exact state of our food stocks.

The other question is that of the small scale voluntary help. In desperate situations voluntary help may be of quite critical importance, perhaps not so much from the actual number of lives it may save, but from the fact that if done in the right way, it carries hope where there was despair and brings into human relationships

with each other people who otherwise stand at opposite sides of an abyss.

The amount of voluntary help has become considerable. As we reported some time ago (C.N.-L. No. 253), the Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad decided in December to issue an appeal for £100,000 for a food relief fund. £97,000 had been received by the end of March. The foodstuffs made available by the Ministry of Food have now been purchased in full by the eight member societies of C.B.S.R.A. engaged in this particular operation and are being sent overseas as rapidly as possible. The Central Fund represents only a part of the total cost. C.B.S.R.A. societies began their individual food purchases last July, using their own funds for the purpose. Only when a further allocation of food was made available in December was a Central Appeal opened. In all, about 2,000 tons of food have now been purchased at a total cost of some £250,000; and rather more than half of this quantity has already reached Europe. France, Poland, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Finland, Italy, Germany and Austria have all received a quota of the food, which is distributed partly by the British voluntary relief teams working in many of these countries, and partly by affiliated voluntary organizations established in the countries themselves. There are now no further supplies to be purchased. An extension of the fund cannot be contemplated, though the small surplus of funds can be usefully disposed of when the present purchases have been completed.

MATERIAL AID FROM THE CHURCHES

We reported in News-Letter No. 253 that the American Churches were deeply concerned to provide material aid for Europe and were collecting not only considerable sums of money, but goods, for this purpose. This help is now becoming effective in Europe.

The work is organized from Geneva, where the World Council of Churches has the services of Dr. Michelfelder of the Lutheran Church in the United States to organize a distribution of material aid as part of the work of the Department of Reconstruction and Inter-Church Aid.

In America the Service Committee of the Church of the Brethren already had a warehouse containing many tons of clothing, flour, soap and other materials, and even 500 cows. The Lutheran Church then formed "Lutheran Relief Inc." and acquired a warehouse in Pennsylvania. All the Churches are co-operating through the Church Committee for Overseas Relief.

The greatest need seemed to be among the hundreds of thousands of refugees pouring into western Germany as they were expelled from the east. Medical aid was sent for refugees at Goettingen, Kassel, and Frankfurt, and for hospitals caring for refugees in Berlin. Next, half a million dollars were cabled to Geneva for purchase of surplus American army stocks to aid refugees. To cope with this, purchasing agents were appointed in Geneva and Paris, and the "Free Port" warehouse in Geneva on the border of France was made available to the Committee. Following on this, about twenty-five thousand pounds of rolled oats have been sent to refugees and fifty thousand dollars' worth of dried milk and other dried foods. Disinfectants, anaesthetics, valuable drugs, bandages and dietetic foods have been sent for clinics in reception areas.

The World Council now has ready for despatch twenty-seven tons of clothes, twelve thousand blankets, two hundred pairs of shoes, and trucks, jeeps and bicycles. Fifty thousand dollars' worth of canned meat from Sweden have arrived and a further eight hundred blankets and hundreds of sewing-machines from America have reached Marseilles. These stocks are being parcelled up for shipment to Holland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Roumania, Poland, Norway, Finland and Italy.

The Swedish Churches are giving powerful help in Poland, Germany, Austria and Hungary, and the Churches in Denmark have an active committee. None of this aid can be distributed to named individuals. All of it passes through the Churches or their relief agencies, which are entirely responsible for distribution. They include such organizations as the Roman Catholic "Caritas" and the German Churches' magnificently organized "Hilfswerk," which not only distributes relief coming from outside, but has done a wonderful work in persuading and enabling Christians in Germany to share what they have with the less fortunate. The relief is given without creedal discrimination to all who are in urgent need.

IS CHARITY NOT FOR EXPORT?

In all this work for material aid that is going on through the Churches, Christians in this country have nothing more than a nominal share. We can send clothes to certain voluntary agencies. We are forbidden to send food. Millions of pounds' worth of surplus American army stocks are littered about the continent of Europe, and we are not allowed to send a penny to Switzerland to help in their purchase and distribution. When any number of British people are now permitted by the Government to go to Switzerland for holidays and to take money there to enjoy themselves, we may reasonably ask,

with greater insistence than before, why the Churches may not send money there to enable them to bear their part immediately in this work of mercy.

One is smitten at times by the sense of our isolation. During the war the desperateness of our situation was keenly appreciated by our friends on the Continent, but now that the war is over our difficulties are of a different order. We are fighting to maintain standards of living and they need to be fought for, but we have other invisible assets to keep and build up. We have a great name to keep on the Continent. It is kept in a hundred ways—by the quality of our administration in Germany, by the goods that we send abroad, by our broadcasts and so on. But we also have a name for voluntary service and simple kindness which must not be forgotten in Europe.

Or let us look at the matter from another point of view. The Church is not a national organization. It may be divided by circumstances into geographical units, but in its true life it is one. The doctrine that if in the Church one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, is not subject to the limiting factor of frontiers: it is true from China to Peru, and if we Christians in this country are prepared to accept this embargo on our charity without protest, we are in reality accepting a limitation of our freedom, and it is good that we should recognize it as such. We in the Christian News-Letter hope that our Church leaders will give the point further airing before long.

It should perhaps be underlined, before we leave the subject, that our argument refers to material aid, which is practically useless unless it is *immediate*. The Committee for Christian Reconstruction in Europe which aims at raising a million pounds in this country for restoring Christian institutions in Europe (see C.N.-L. No. 243) works through the Reconstruction Department of the World Council of Churches on a long term plan, and what is said about restrictions on sending money abroad in no way affects the need for raising it now, for present use where permitted and for future use on a much larger scale.

THE LORD IS RISEN: HE IS RISEN INDEED

In a few days we shall have celebrated the glory of Easter. Our Supplement this week emphasizes the point that Easter is not for the Christian a sign that he may hope to escape from this world, but that he can be redeemed in it.

Most of us begin to understand the power of the risen Christ only when we see it at work in men and women. There are many unwritten lives of the saints, and this war has added to their number.

Elizabeth Pilenko came from a wealthy land-owning family in the south of Russia. She went to the Women's University of St. Petersburg and began at the age of eighteen, while still a student, to teach in the evening courses at the great Putilov factory. She published two books of poems and was a close friend of some of the best-known younger Russian poets.

She became a keen socialist revolutionary and during the years 1914-1917 her life was taken up with revolutionary activities. After the October Revolution she worked with extraordinary skill and audacity in rescuing victims from the Terror. Later she became Mayor of her own home town, working for justice between the Whites and the Reds, both of whom had resorted to violence against their opponents. She was denounced as a Bolshevik, tried and acquitted.

In 1923 she came to Paris. The excesses of the Revolution as it developed revolted her, though she remained to her death a staunch advocate of its principles. She found her way back to religious faith largely under the influence of Serge Bulgakov, who had been a Marxist. She presented herself to the authorities of the Russian Church in Paris and announced that she wished to become a religious, "beginning at once, to-day," and to found a monastery. She had her way, but she was not the traditional Russian Orthodox religious. She was accused by some of neglecting the long services and the traditional contemplation. "I must go my way," she said, "I am for the suffering people." In the early morning she was at the markets buying cheap food for the people she fed, bringing it back in a sack on her back. She was a familiar figure in the slum, in her poor black habit and her worn-out men's shoes.

The many Russian refugees in France in those days were stateless persons, many of them poverty-stricken, without privilege, without claim on any of the services which the country provided for the poor. Mother Maria worked among the poorest. She discovered that Russians who contracted tuberculosis were lying in a filthy hovel on the banks of the Seine into which the Paris police used to throw those syphilitic wrecks which they picked up along the riverside. With ten francs in her pocket she bought a chateau and opened a sanatorium.

Then she found that there were hundreds of Russians in lunatic asylums all over France. They had just "disappeared" into these institutions, where no questions were asked about them. She raised a public outcry and got many of them released. In those days the Russian congregations in and around Paris were living examples of what the early apostolic communities must have been. They were real homes for the poor and the unwanted. Russians living in tenements could find there comfort and friendship. The Churches had their own labour exchanges, clinics and many other services, and the convent, over which Mother Maria presided, was central to their life.

When the German occupation took place Mother Maria summoned her chaplain and told him that she felt that her particular duty was to render all possible assistance to persecuted Jews. She knew that this would mean imprisonment and probably death, and she gave him the option of leaving. He refused. For a month the convent was a haven for Jews. Women and children were hidden within its walls. Money poured in to enable them to escape from France and hundreds were got away. At the end of a month the Gestapo came. Mother Maria was arrested and sent to the concentration camp at Ravensbrueck. Her chaplain was sent to Buchenwald, where he died of starvation and overwork.

The story of her life in the camp is only now being pieced together. She was known even to the guards as "that wonderful Russian nun," and it is doubtful whether they had any intention of killing her. She had been there two and a half years when a new block of buildings was erected in the camp, and the prisoners were told that these were to be hot baths. A day came when a few dozen prisoners from the women's quarters were lined up outside the buildings. One girl became hysterical. Mother Maria, who had not been selected, came up to her, "Don't be frightened," she said, "look, I shall take your turn," and in line with the rest, she passed through the doors. It was Good Friday, 1945.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss

THE TOMB WAS EMPTY

BY D. M. MACKINNON

"Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified ; he is risen ; he is not here ; behold the place where they laid him." So the young man in the sepulchre to the women. "He is not here," and we can gloss perhaps "he was, but is no longer" ; for that surely is implied by the words "he is risen." From the place where they laid him to rest on the evening of the first Good Friday, he has passed forth, and the stone, rolled then to the door of the sepulchre, is now rolled away, a silent witness of his passage.

If we ask ourselves what Easter means, we must first find its significance where these faithful women found it, namely, in what it makes plain concerning Jesus of Nazareth. It is only if we are profoundly concerned about him, that Easter has any real import for us. For its message is not that the noblest of human personalities miraculously survived death, but that God raised Jesus from the dead. It is only therefore to the Church, which has dared, in the exercises of Lent and Holy Week, to watch with him upon his way of sorrows, that the word to the women in the first instance has meaning ; for only in the Church do men and women strive to stand where Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome, stood, and see and hear what they once saw and heard.

It is paradoxical but true to say that it is only through Easter that we understand Good Friday, and only through Good Friday that the burden of Easter is made plain. When in one of our noblest Good Friday hymns we sing of the Cross as a victor's trophy, we are daring to view the darkness of Golgotha already suffused with the brightness of the Easter dawn. And when on Easter Day we strive to make our own Scott Holland's words "when he rose, his whole life rose with him," we can only do so by looking back, by remembering who it is that has risen.

The stupendous event, of which the empty tomb is the sign, is first and foremost the Father's Amen to the obedience of Jesus unto death. Its significance lies in its relation to the biography of Christ, to his movement from life to death, which is, by that event, taken and defined as supremely the focus-point of God's eternal purpose to bring his fallen and sinful world back to himself. It is only to those who have striven to know Christ after the flesh that this event has import. For they alone know in slightest measure what it is that on Easter Day is brought again from the dead.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE OF CHRIST

And what is that thing? What is this life of Jesus which rises from the dead? It is a human life certainly, albeit a life controlled altogether by the idea of perfected obedience to the will of God. It is a life whose movement expresses the intensely human story of retreat from the broad highways of success and assurance to the narrow defiles of failure and bewilderment. We cannot deny that the Gospels present us with the picture of a suffering individual like ourselves. No Socratic indifference, for instance, marks the Christ on the threshold of his final hour. But for all that he goes on his way unhesitatingly to death in unflinching obedience to his Father's commandment.

We see him pass to a place where all judgment is taken from him, where men look on him and cry "He saved others; himself he cannot save." Powerless he dies and is laid in the tomb, becoming "pure pastness," living only in the memory of those who had known his comradeship. Yet if we listen to his words, we are left in no doubt that he himself claimed that this life, moving so relentlessly to the desolation of its end, was fraught with infinite significance for the men and women around him. He makes inescapably clear how paradoxical the nature of His Messiahship is. He allows men and women to fasten their hopes on him as their deliverer only when he is able without equivocation to proclaim that he, the Son of man, must suffer. He will only permit them to think of him as entering history from beyond, when he is able to make it abundantly clear that he belongs so completely to history that he is about to share the common fate of our humanity—namely death. So the riddle of his person is put to men. They are to exercise themselves about one who if he claims indeed to be the anointed of God, does so only at the point when the cost of that dignity is seen to lie in complete surrender to the dominion of death.

So he puts the question to men concerning himself, bidding them think of him not as one immune from the common fate of humanity, but as one utterly involved in it, who none the less dares to claim the response of faith at the moment when that fate seems completely to have overmastered him. He dares to ask men to see the saving act of God in his own tragic history and above all in the human loneliness and pain and horror in which it ends. They are not to look for the redemption of Israel anywhere else save in what he is and in the Father's business he is about his whole life through. "The hopes and fears, of all the years," are, as it were, drawn and brought to rest in Gethsemane, where a man kneels trembling under the olive trees, to a Roman tribunal, where he is mocked and scourged, and to a hillside, where he dies the death of a criminal.

It is this Christ, who has shared our lot in this life so completely as to know death in its grimmest form, who is raised, and in that raising, his claim to be our true deliverer is vindicated. He does not merely survive, as though his death did not really happen. He is raised up out of death, so that men may know that ultimately the power of the evil which holds their life in bondage has been broken. The Christ is no deliverer who takes men out of history; he is revealed as victorious in history. He does not obliterate the substance of our humanity, but restores to it its true nature, which it had lost through sin. He is the second Adam, the representative of mankind restored into the image of God. That is why we can see that in one sense every moment in that life of his is an Easter Day, picked out anew and declared as the expression of the saving will of God. We are now able to view the familiar movements of a human life, the actions and reactions of which it is made up and the death which is its inevitable conclusion, all as the very act of God himself, who, in it all, is making manifest the fact that his redemptive power is so at work in this sinful world of ours that death itself is swallowed up in victory.

THE MEANING OF EASTER FOR THE CHURCH

It is in the Church that the meaning of Easter is first made known because, as the Body of Christ, she strives to reach into that mystery of life through death which it was his mission to accomplish. This is not to say that her members claim to do what he alone could do. On the contrary, it is part of the aim of the Passiontide observance to make them realize how deep an abyss separates them at once in understanding and accomplishment from the isolated Christ. They know again with the disciples in the garden their Master withdrawn from them and enveloped in an agony and a glory which overwhelms them and drives them to escape into the oblivion of sleep. While that is true, however, those who are baptized into his death in the fellowship of the Church and nourished by his Body and Blood in the Eucharist, know that the deep centre of their lives is in his dying and rising again. It was a Reformed theologian (the late Dr. P. T. Forsyth) who said that we have no other ultimate wealth save our share in the Son's glorification of his Father; but his teaching here is that of Catholic tradition as well.

The return of Easter is a great source of assurance and of hope to the Christian because it tells him again that the sinful and frustrated and futile being he knows himself at best to be is nevertheless locked in the deeps of the work of God, that victorious work which is wrought to an end on the stage of history in Jesus of Nazareth, who is declared by his resurrection to be the one through whom the whole

range of human history finds meaning. And this is no mere sense of private consolation to the Christian. For he knows that his baptism and his communion with the crucified and risen Christ do not take him out of history but bring his life, the man he himself is, into the centre of all history because Christ is that centre. Jesus of Nazareth belongs to history, and the raising of his crucified body from the tomb attests the fact that his achievement is an historical achievement. A concrete life and death are revealed as the place of final victory. The intensity of the Christian's concern with history, at once in prayer and in action, issues from the fact that he lives not by the power of an anonymous spiritual force, but by the Bread which is the flesh of Jesus given for the life of the world once for all on Calvary. It follows, therefore, that the Christian is called to gather into the context of Christ's obedience the whole range of human activity in which he as a human being is involved.

THE RESURRECTION AND OUR HUMAN SITUATION

But we must dare to go further than this. The work of Christ is altogether unique because he alone is God become man. Yet, when that is said and indeed just because that is true, we must not be surprised to find at those points where man tries to grapple seriously with the human situation in which he find himself that that human situation displays an earnest of its fulfilment in Christ. When the philosopher Hegel saw in the death and resurrection of Christ an expression, in the form of a myth, of the fundamental law of the being of the universe, he was not wrong in seeing a connection between the two but in making Christ subordinate to that law and not seeing how, in his uniqueness, Christ both reveals the true nature of and gives validity to that law. For the Christian it is the crucified man Christ who alone gives sense to history. He is no mere illustration of a principle, but himself the only source of truly human living. Upon his work all depends ; but because the dimensions of his work are cosmic (he is the Word through whom the heavens were made), we may expect to see, in human life, especially where its problems are most intensely realized, a refraction of that which is supremely and eminently expressed in him. It is, of course, in the Church alone, the meaning as well as the ground of whose life is contained in the death and resurrection of Christ, that this quality of human existence is discerned for what it is, for it is in the Church that the character of human history as ultimately the return, in Christ, of the creature to his creator receives self-conscious expression. But it is the duty of the Church to strive, in its members, to bring all things into the captivity of Christ partly because *in themselves* all things demand that subjection if their true nature is to be revealed and expressed.

If this is true of the sphere of the Church it follows equally that any man, whoever he may be, whose concern with his world expresses that crucial quality which will enable him to rest in none of the easy solutions which conveniently ignore some of its profoundest problems, must enter that dimension of existence in which we see the significance of the Empty Tomb. It is a noteworthy fact that the resurrection-faith is neither world-renouncing nor world-affirming in the sense in which we normally use these phrases. We cannot speak of it as the former as we watch the Christ turn his back on the sunlit Galilean plain and go, in fixed expectation of death, to the Capital. Again and again the stern, hard note of self-denial is sounded. The Lord seems to know no will of his own. In obedience to the Father, he seems content again and again to leave men to themselves. If we study the Gospels closely, very many loose ends seem left untied! The very training of the disciples is hardly complete. And yet for all that we notice a deep concern with the texture of every situation in which he is involved. There are no irrelevant accidents that seem to fall outside the context of his obedience. His life seems sometimes made up of episodes; but they are never interruptions. Even the extravagant devotion of the woman with the ointment is woven into the texture of his purpose; it has its place.

All this we should bear in mind when we ask ourselves what is raised. It is the life of Jesus that is brought again from the tomb, that life wherein the second Adam affirmed in deed that he was nothing of himself, and yet that the littlest fragment of which his days were fashioned was of significance to the Father. His life, as it moves to death, attests the problematic quality as well as the achievement, the glorious dignity as well as the littleness, of men. He is man; "God of the substance of his Father, begotten before all ages; man of the substance of his mother, born into the world." There is no point at which the problem of human living receives so unequivocal a definition as in Jesus, and that because in him is contained the solution. The true nature of the paradoxical situation in which we live as men stands revealed in the light of this representative life and death and in the mighty act of divine power and majesty which is its consummation and the earnest of the consummation of all things.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE BURDEN OF OUR HUMANITY

It is because of this that the Church, when she faithfully preaches the resurrection, must always make clear to men that the resurrection-faith can only maintain itself when men resolutely accept the burden of their humanity and their solidarity with their fellows. To speak, as she sometimes does, as though she possessed

a recipe for security from the tensions and challenges and responsibilities of our human situation, is to turn her back upon her crucified and risen Lord. Her concern is always with those who know their poverty and their wealth as men and who, out of the corruption and misery and frustration of this world, yet hunger after and strive to realize that perfect nature which can only come to them as God's gift in Christ.

Men cannot turn their back upon their manhood, nor treat any part of it as irrelevant to what they themselves are. Because they are men, they are involved in the situations in which the Christ was involved. For all the abyss that separates them from him, if he is to heal and to save them it can only be in the depths of their existence as men. Conversely, it is into the context of that same life of Christ, raised and crowned by the raising, a life from which nothing is to be dismissed as irrelevant nor taken as complete in itself, that we are to bring our own and the Church is commanded to bring that of humanity. Apart from him there is no focussing of the diverse stuff of human history upon a centre and no return of man to God as the source and end of his own existence. But in him we know and are assured that God is with us once more and that in our return to him the meaning of every perplexity which troubles the mind and every suffering which wounds the heart of humanity is to be found.

"Our hearts are restless." What meaning has that restlessness if it is not related to that point at which the history of man is depicted as his return to God? Yet at that point we do not rest as the world knows rest; rather we are driven forward to further, to deeper, to more crucial questioning of ourselves and of our common existence as men and even of the purpose of the God who leads us back to himself. But that experience is but a parable of the descent of Christ into the tomb, wherein all our hopes are set. For there at that point, where life had no more to offer him of opportunity, he was met by the Word of his Father raising him from the dead.

"Behold the place where they laid him."

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